

Ms. McCollum: Madam Speaker, I and the following members rise in recognition of the late U.S. Representative John Murtha's lifelong dedication to members of our armed services: Representative Tim Walz, Representative Bruce Braley, Representative Keith Ellison, Representative James Oberstar, Representative Leonard Boswell, Representative David Loebsack, Representative Collin Peterson, and Representative Tom Latham.

Chairman John Murtha was a passionate legislator and decorated ex-Marine who never stopped fighting for our men and women in uniform. In 1974, Murtha, then an officer in the Marine Reserves, became the first Vietnam War combat veteran elected to the House of Representatives. As Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, Congressman Murtha was a tireless advocate for our troops, military families, and our veterans on Capitol Hill. At a time when we are mourning his passing, it is important to recognize Chairman Murtha's work to ensure that veterans receive support. The undersigned members would like to call attention to the work he did to secure the benefits promised and earned by 22,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel in our states.

In January of 2007, the Department of Defense authorized Post-Deployment Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) program, which provides additional pay when a soldier deploys more frequently than DOD policy requires. For the two years since the authorization of PDMRA, the Pentagon's implementation of the program has been slow and incomplete. As result, thousands of National Guard and Reserve members who have served multiple and extended tours in Iraq and Afghanistan did not receive the pay to which they are entitled. This problem has affected National Guard and Reserve personnel in every state across the nation. Members organized to bring attention to this problem and to find a resolution. The undersigned members have sent letters to the Pentagon, organized events, and met with armed services personnel for years and asked for the Chairman's assistance and leadership.

Chairman Murtha heard our request and took action. He made phone calls directly to Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Army Secretary Pete Geren. He included language to remedy the delay in the FY10 Defense Appropriations bill, and in numerous letters to the Department of Defense since 2007 Congressman Murtha supported his colleagues in making it clear that further delay in resolving this issue was unacceptable to our members of the armed services. Because of Chairman Murtha's support, the Department of Defense issued Army policy guidance for cash reimbursements for PDMRA for Reserve and National Guard personnel, which represents a crucial step in finally resolving this issue.

The late Congressman John Murtha has shown throughout his time in the military and in Congress that he is a dedicated leader on fighting on behalf of military families. In honor of his lifelong commitment, I and other members of Congress would like to submit this statement for the Congressional record.

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